

# Missouri Schools for the Severely Disabled Eligibility FAQ

## Questions and Answers Regarding Eligibility for the Missouri Schools for the Severely Disabled (MSSD)

### 1. What are the evaluation criteria to be considered for Missouri Schools for the Severely Disabled eligibility?

The criteria for eligibility consideration are discussed at length in the [Eligibility Determination Resource Guide](#) on this website. Essentially, the student must be functioning overall in the severe range of ability (including adaptive behavior) of **below** four (4) standard deviations below the mean **and** MSSD must be the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) for the student. Both criteria must be met. A single IQ score at or below the criterion level is not sufficient to qualify the student. The entire packet of information about the student is reviewed. Decisions on eligibility are made by a team of MSSD personnel and the decision on such eligibility is not appealable. The home district may resubmit new information for consideration, but all information previously submitted will also be included in the decision making process. It is incumbent on MSSD to ensure that a student is appropriate for placement in our District.

The answers in the Justification for Separate School Placement (JOP) are used when determining whether or not MSSD would be the LRE for the student. Responses to all eight (8) questions are required.

### 2. What should a school district consider before requesting MSSD eligibility?

The cognitive ability of the child, the functional ability of the child, and the appropriateness of a segregated placement must all be considered. Students who educationally benefit from special education and related services that can be provided by local educational agencies are not considered eligible for services through MSSD. In general, students with disabilities such as cognitive deficits falling two to three standard deviations below the mean, Speech or Language Impairments, Hearing Impaired/Deaf, Visually Impaired/Blind, Learning Disabilities, Emotional Disturbance, Other Health Impaired, Traumatic Brain Injury, or Orthopedically Impaired can receive an appropriate education when served by local educational agencies. Students must meet the cognitive deficit requirement to be eligible, **and** the school district must justify that the public separate school placement proposal represents the least restrictive environment.

A student, who meets the significant cognitive deficits criteria, and is accepted by MSSD must attain the age of five (5) years before they may enroll. However, MSSD cannot accept students who are classified under Young Child with a Developmental Delay (YCDD) as there is no preschool program. Students must be considered to be in kindergarten. Additionally, MSSD does not accept students who are homebound and unable to attend school at least part-time. Students may be enrolled in the MSSD until the close of the school term during which their twenty-first (21st) birthday occurs.

**3. Is there a form that MSSD requires for the Justification for Separate School Placement?**

MSSD does not have a standard form, however, a format for the information and the content required is contained in the [Missouri State Plan Regulation X](#) and in the [Eligibility Determination Resource Guide](#) on this website. Answers to all eight (8) questions are required. The information included may seem repetitive, but each question has a different focus and all of the answers must be provided.

If the IEP team is considering public separate school as a placement option for the student, the district must document the justification for such placement in writing. This documentation must show that the district has:

- A. considered educating the child in the Local Education Agency (LEA);
- B. identified supplementary aids and services that would be needed to educate the child in the LEA; and,
- C. articulated why the LEA cannot serve the child in the LEA in a placement that would benefit the child.

**4. When should we change the number of minutes and consider the student placement options on the IEP?**

Placement options can be considered prior to submission of the student eligibility information to MSSD. However, the number of minutes in the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) must reflect the level of the student's current services. Therefore, the number of minutes should not be changed to reflect the number of minutes in the state school's day until after the student is found eligible for the MSSD's services. Additionally, while the placement can be changed under the placement considerations section of the IEP, the actual school placement listed must remain with the home district until the student is found eligible.

**5. What documentation does the local school district need to send to MSSD for an eligibility determination?**

The documentation required is explained in detail in the [Eligibility Determination Resource Guide](#) on this website. If all documentation required is not submitted, a letter will be sent to the district requesting the information. **An eligibility determination can not be made without all required components.**

**6. What is the process/timeline for an eligibility determination?**

When MSSD receives an eligibility determination packet from a district, a letter is sent to the student's parents notifying them of the submission and providing them seven (7) days to contact MSSD with any information they may wish to provide. At the end of this time, the eligibility team reviews the information and determines:

- A. more information is needed; or
- B. the student is eligible; or
- C. the student is ineligible.

A letter is sent to the district setting forth of the decision or requesting further information. If the student is eligible, the notice shall specify the school site assignment should the student be referred.

When a clear decision cannot be made about eligibility for services the district will be notified that an interim IEP will be required for the initial placement. This IEP shall be developed in

accordance with the provisions of [Regulation IV.2](#) of the State Plan, Individualized Education Programs. The interim IEP may exceed thirty (30) days if circumstances warrant.

While MSSD processes submitted eligibility packets as soon as possible, the entire process does take time since there is usually more than one step. In fact, in approximately 90% of the submissions the district is asked to provide other information or clarify statements made in the JOP. Because there is often a need for further information, it is advisable for districts to submit eligibility packets a few weeks before the end of the school year so that personnel will be available to provide the additional information and a decision on the student's eligibility can be made prior to the start of the next school year.

**7. What is the next step once the local school district has been notified that a student has been found eligible for MSSD?**

The IEP team must determine if a referral to MSSD is the most appropriate placement for the student to receive a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). If so, the district may refer the student to the MSSD program by submitting the referral form, a copy of the amended IEP, and a copy of the Notice of Action. The Individual Education Plan (IEP) team should amend the IEP to reflect that MSSD operates for 1800 minutes of service per week. The IEP team should consider the range of placement options available for the student.

The district shall submit the referral only after the parents have been offered all rights available to them in relation to the Procedural Safeguards.

Upon receipt of the referral information, enrollment papers will be mailed to the parent by MSSD.

Within thirty (30) days following initial enrollment of the student in the MSSD, an IEP/placement review conference shall be held. The purpose of this review is to confirm the appropriateness of continued placement in the MSSD as the LRE to provide a free appropriate public education for the student.

**8. A student currently attending MSSD moves into our district, how should we proceed in order to continue placement in MSSD?**

A student who is enrolled in a school that is part of the MSSD district and moves from one home school district to another may transfer enrollment immediately on the basis of the justification for separate school placement, current IEP and evaluation report. Such a move is considered an interim placement, not to exceed thirty (30) days, during which the new local district follows the transfer procedures outlined in Regulation III.3 of the State Plan, Procedures for Evaluation and Determination of Eligibility, to confirm placement in the MSSD as the least restrictive educational environment for the student. The district then compiles and submits to the MSSD the Agreement for Continued Placement under the existing IEP.

**9. A student from another district who was in a separate day school facility (not part of MSSD) has recently moved into our district, what must we do in order to have MSSD consider eligibility or enrollment?**

A thirty (30) day interim placement in the MSSD may be available for students with severe disabilities who are changing school districts due to a change in residence. These students must have been receiving services in their local district; through cooperative arrangement by their home district with another school district; in a special school district; or, in an out-of-state program for students with severe disabilities. To qualify for this interim placement, the criteria stated in [Regulation X](#) of the State Plan must be met:

- The current IEP and evaluation report are adopted by the new school district pursuant to transfer procedures provided within [Regulation IV.](#), Least Restrictive Environment of the State Plan.
- The new district submits a copy of the student's current IEP and evaluation report to the MSSD with a letter acknowledging adoption of the documents. In the same letter, the new district will verify the previous placement provided educational services in a self-contained classroom with students with severe disabilities in a separate school building. In addition, the district requests that the student be served in a thirty (30) day interim placement to confirm concurrence with placement in the MSSD as the least restrictive educational environment for the student.
- The MSSD will issue a letter of interim placement assignment if the information submitted is viewed as substantiating the request.
- Enrollment paperwork must be completed at the onset of the thirty (30) day interim placement period. MSSD will notify the LEA of the date of the student's enrollment.
- During the thirty (30) day interim placement, the local district shall follow the referral procedures to seek eligibility determination in accordance with established MSSD referral procedures. Upon receipt of the referral, the MSSD will issue a notice of action to the district and parents confirming continued placement in the State School. If, during the thirty (30) day interim period, the local school district fails to submit the Justification of Separate School Placement (JOP), the student shall be served by the LEA.

If the MSSD is not confirmed as the student's least restrictive educational environment, the local district is notified of this decision and becomes responsible for providing the required special education and related services in accordance with Missouri State Plan [Regulation V](#), Procedural Safeguards, and [Regulation IV.2.](#), Individualized Education Programs of the State Plan..